

DRAFT

These Draft Terms of Reference have been developed prior to the launch of the Victorian Protected Areas Council. Once the Council formally establishes, these Terms of Reference will need to be discussed and voted on by the membership. It is anticipated they will be tweaked to encompass input from members who were not involved in their drafting.

In the meantime, this Draft will be used as a guiding document for prospective members.

Victorian Protected Areas Council

Connecting Park Managers - Protecting National Parks

Terms of Reference

Background

Victoria's national parks and conservation reserves form a world-class of protected area¹ network, encompasses representative examples of many of the State's diverse ecosystems and much of the biodiversity they contain. They safeguard many of the State's flora and fauna species, preserve sites and features of indigenous and historical heritage, provide vital environmental services like carbon storage and water catchments, and offer nature-based recreation that supports local and regional visitor economies. They are valued as a living cultural landscape by Traditional Owners, with many now jointly managed.

Despite their significance, these protected areas face ongoing management and resourcing challenges. Marking the 50th anniversary of the National Parks Act (1975), a group of retired park staff identified the need for a professional body to offer independent advice and advocate for improved resourcing and management of Victoria's protected areas.

The Victorian Protected Areas Council will engage with government and conservation agencies, Traditional Owner groups, NGOs, recreational bodies, and the media to promote and advocate for better resourcing, management, professional capabilities, and strategic additions to Victoria's protected areas.

Vision

By 2030, Victoria's national parks and conservation reserves, and the important natural and heritage values they protect, are healthy, well-resourced and managed, and are widely appreciated and respectfully enjoyed by the community.

¹ A protected area is a clearly defined geographical space recognised, dedicated and managed through legal or other effective means to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values (*International Union for Conservation of Nature 2008*).

In Victoria protected areas on public land include: national, state and wilderness parks; marine national parks and sanctuaries; conservation parks; nature conservation, nature and bushland reserves; some natural features reserves; and reference and remote & natural areas.

Purpose

- To advocate for improved effectiveness of protected area management in Victoria.
- To advocate for strategic increases to the protected area network to help meet Australia’s 30x30 commitment².
- To support the professional development of current protected area professionals.
- To provide a forum for former protected area professionals to stay connected and continue contributing to protected area management in Victoria.

Scope

The geographic scope for the Victorian Protected Areas Council is principally protected areas on public land in Victoria, including areas managed under the National Parks Act (1975) and areas primarily reserved for conservation purposes under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act (1978). Private land and areas managed under other legislation, such as the Forests Act (1958), and areas not reserved for conservation purposes under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act are not generally a focus for the Council. Although most of Victoria’s publicly owned protected area estate is currently managed by Parks Victoria, some areas are managed or co-managed by other organisations, including The Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority, Philip Island Nature Parks and several Traditional Owner Land Management Boards.

Aims

1. Establishing a professional organisation

To establish a leading industry association for protected area professionals in Victoria.

2. Advocacy for protected area management

To advocate for, and provide advice and commentary on, national park and conservation reserve management and potential strategic additions to the protected area network to:

- The Victorian Government
- State Government agencies
- Members of parliament
- Traditional owners
- Non-government organisations and peak bodies
- The media

Areas of Advocacy:

- The value of Victoria’s parks and conservation reserves and the threats posed to them
- Strategic additions to the protected area network under the principles of comprehensive, adequate and representative
- Management directions
- Management effectiveness, including monitoring and evaluation frameworks and programs
- Legislative compliance

² The Australian Government has set a national target to protect and conserve 30% of Australia’s landmass and 30% of Australia’s marine areas by 2030, in alignment with Target 3 of the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#). In 2022, State, Territory and National Environment Ministers agreed to work together to reach the national 30 by 30 target.

- Visitor, conservation and heritage management frameworks and programs
- Park planning frameworks
- Management plans, including compliance with approved plans
- Proposals for investment and infrastructure development
- Funding and budgets
- Resourcing and capacity (including staffing levels)
- Efficiency and effectiveness of business systems
- Professional (i.e. recruitment) standards

Advocacy is to be undertaken by:

- Engaging with government, agencies, etc.
- Partnering with and supporting allied organisations (e.g. Traditional Owner groups, non-government organisations, peak bodies).
- Supporting allied organisations to activate communities and promote the benefits of national parks and other protected areas, including for regional and local communities and economies.

3. Professional development and knowledge sharing

- To provide a body of experts to which current protected area managers can refer to seek advice, guidance and/or mentoring outside their employer organisation.
- To facilitate connections and networking opportunities between past and present protected area managers.
- To facilitate the gathering, sharing and passing on of knowledge between past and present protected area managers.

4. Connecting former colleagues

- To assist past staff in connecting with former colleagues.
- To coordinate online conversations and face to face social gatherings.
- To facilitate the ongoing contribution of former staff to contemporary protected area management.
- To support former and retired colleagues, where needed.

5. To establish effective and respectful relationships

To establish effective and respectful relationships with:

- The state government, state opposition, other political parties and independent MPs.
- Organisations and agencies involved in the management of Victoria's public land protected area estate and the environmental and heritage assets they protect.
- Traditional Owner groups.
- Non-government organisations and recreational peak bodies.

Membership

Membership will initially be restricted to retired and former³ staff of Victorian agencies involved in the management of protected areas on public land, or the environmental or heritage values they contain, who support the Council's vision and purpose. Once the Council is established and mechanisms are in place to manage potential conflicts of interest, existing employees will also be invited to join.

Membership is encouraged and promoted through the Council's communication tools and by direct invitation from other members. Prospective members are invited to fill in a membership application form, which they submit to the Membership Officer for processing. The membership form requires applicants to agree to abide by the Council's Terms of Reference.

The Membership Officer forwards applicants requests for membership to the Committee for endorsement.

Members are expected to:

- Demonstrate views aligned with the vision and purpose of the Council.
- Participate in Council meetings and other activities as much as they feel they can.
- Provide advice and input to the committee on the work of the Council.
- Advocate the purpose and work of the Council to others.
- Notify members of the Council of matters of interest or risks to protected area management in Victoria.
- Be open and honest in discussions.
- Be respectful and demonstrate high standards of behaviour, both within the Council and with partner and other organisations.

Membership Criteria

1. Retired and former staff of Parks Victoria and other Victorian public land protected area management organisations (e.g. Philip Island Nature Parks, Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority, Traditional Owner Land Management Boards, VEAC, DEECA, etc.) with experience in protected area management or the management of environmental or heritage values or recreation in protected areas, including:
 - a) Planning
 - b) On-ground management
 - c) Program and/or project planning or delivery; or
 - d) Measurement and evaluation of management effectiveness
2. The committee may accept applications from other people who can demonstrate a depth of knowledge and experience in protected area management but who have not worked for a public land protected area management organisation (e.g. persons who have worked in research or academia).

³ Former staff are individuals who have previously worked in protected area management or the management of environmental or heritage values in protected areas in Victoria but are no longer employed in the sector.

Committee

The business of the Council is managed by, or under the direction of, the Committee. The Committee exercises all powers of the Council, except those powers that this Terms of Reference or legislation require to be exercised by general meetings of the membership.

The Committee will develop a strategy for the Council and an annual plan for its implementation. The output of the Council and its ability to achieve its purpose and aims is dependent on the willingness of the membership to lead and support particular projects. The committee is not responsible for the delivery of the entire output of the Council.

The Committee may therefore establish Sub-committees for ongoing activities (e.g. social networking) or Project Teams for short-term tasks (e.g. responding to a proposed draft management plan while it is open for public consultation). The Committee will provide or endorse a terms of reference for each Sub-committee and Project Team.

Composition of Committee

- President
- Vice President
- Secretary
 - Assistant Secretary
- Membership Officer
 - Assistant Membership Officer
- Social Officer
 - Assistant Social Officer
- Media Officer
 - Assistant Media Officer
- Web Master
 - Assistant Web Master

Assistant roles are intended to:

- Help share the workload of the primary position.
- Proxy for the primary position when the incumbent is unavailable.
- Become familiar with the role of the primary position so they may feel more comfortable in nominating for it should it becomes vacant.

The Committee is elected by members at an Annual General Meeting (AGM), from nominations received by members. Nominees will be required to have at least 5 years' relevant experience in protected area management or the management of environmental or heritage values or recreation in protected areas. Should nominations for any position not be forthcoming the membership may leave it vacant and the committee seek to co-opt someone into the vacant position.

Should a committee position become vacant, the Committee has discretion to call for nominations and a vote if needed, co-opt an individual to meet the skill set or hold the position over until the next AGM.

The Committee leads the Council's direction and strategy, make timely decisions and coordinate the business of the Council.

Duties of Committee members

President

The President is responsible for arranging and presiding over meetings, ensuring good governance, keeping the Council to its purpose, and ruling over disputes. The President leads the Council in advocating for protected areas and improving protected area management.

Vice President

The Vice President supports the President as needed and, in close consultation with the President, is responsible for coordinating day-to-day relationships with key stakeholders, including Government and agencies. The Vice President proxies for the President when they are unavailable.

If the President is absent or unavailable, the Vice President will act in their place. If both the President and Vice President are absent or unavailable, the Committee will nominate another member to act in their place.

Secretary

The Secretary supports the President to ensure the effective and efficient running of the Council and manage its day-to-day activities, including meetings, correspondence and other things that arise from time to time. They work closely with the President to develop meeting agendas and record meeting minutes.

Assistant Secretary

The Assistant Secretary supports the Secretary as needed and proxies for the Secretary when they are unavailable.

Membership Officer

The Membership Officer coordinates the attraction of members and processing of membership applications, maintains the membership database, and ensures member data privacy obligations and requests are met.

Assistant Membership Officer

The Assistant Membership Officer supports the Membership Officer as needed and proxies for the Membership Officer when they are unavailable.

Social Officer

The Social Officer coordinates social activities, particularly those that enable members to meet face to face. They work closely with the Web Master to ensure member-only content on the Council's website is current and accurate. They also coordinate outreach to members who may require support from fellow members.

Assistant Social Officer

The Assistant Social Officer supports the Social Officer as needed and proxies for the Social Officer when they are unavailable.

Media Officer

The Media Officer works with the President and Vice President to develop media releases and coordinate requests for comment by media organisations. They liaise with members with expert knowledge to provide content and fact-check information, as required. They work closely with the Web Master to ensure public-facing content on the Council's website is current and accurate.

Assistant Media Officer

The Assistant Media Officer supports the Media Officer as needed and proxies for the Media Officer when they are unavailable.

Web Master

The Web Master coordinates and maintains the Council's website, including identification and prompt resolution of any technical issues. They work closely with other committee members to ensure website content is current and accurate.

Assistant Web Master

The Assistant Web Master supports the Web Master as needed and proxies for the Web Master when they are unavailable.

Term

All Committee positions are appointed for a term of twelve months. At the end of that period, positions remain in place until vacated at the AGM. Existing committee members may be re-nominated and re-appointed through election for a further term at an AGM.

Meetings

General Meetings

General meetings of the Council membership will be held approximately quarterly or more or less often, as required, to

- Develop and review progress against the annual plan
- Share ideas and insights among members
- Update members and receive feedback on Committee, Sub-committee and Project Team activities
- Provide opportunities for members to make suggestions and highlight issues
- Provide opportunities for social connection among members

All members can attend general meetings. Sub-committees and Project Teams may report back to the membership at general meetings.

An Annual General Meeting (AGM) will be held to:

- Receive reports from the President and other key officer bearers on the activities and performance of the Council;
- Vacate all current Committee positions;
- Elect the Committee for the next 12 months;
- Determine membership fees, if required; and
- Consider any motions put forward for amendment, variation or modification of this Terms of Reference.

Nominations for Committee positions and motions to be tabled at the AGM must be seconded by another member and sent to the Secretary two weeks before the AGM.

The President will nominate an independent person (e.g. a member who is not nominating for a position on the incoming committee) to oversee the election process for the Committee. The membership will vote on Committee nominations and motions raised at an AGM.

An Extraordinary General Meeting may be called if supported by a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority of members to consider any motion or motions put.

Committee Meetings

Committee meetings are held monthly or as agreed by the Committee. Committee meetings are presided over by the President. All Committee members, including assistant roles, have equal voting rights at Committee meetings.

Meeting Forum

Due to the widely dispersed nature of the Council's membership, Committee and general meetings are mainly held online. However, opportunities to meet in person at locations convenient to the majority of attending members are sought, where possible.

Project Teams

Project Teams will generally comprise 2-4 members who have a keen interest in a project and volunteer to be involved in it. The Committee and Project Team will jointly agree on the project's purpose, timelines, outputs and who will lead it.

The Project Leader will be accountable for the refinement of the project's purpose, and adjustment of it during implementation if needed, in consultation with the Project Team and the Committee. The Project Leader will coordinate project planning, implementation and progress reporting to the Committee.

No members will be asked or expected to join Project Teams or deliver any tasks, other than what they have volunteered for.

Governance

Decision Making

A quorum for decisions at Committee Meetings is half of the Committee plus one. Committee decisions ~~are~~ will, where possible, be made by consensus (i.e. members are satisfied with the decision even though it may not be their first choice). If consensus is not possible, the decision is that of the majority of Committee Members present.

Suggestions or issues put forward by the membership at a general meeting will be elevated to the Committee for consideration.

The Council may advocate, campaign or take action on a position as determined by the Committee. This may not be supported by all members. Individual members are not required to support each and every decision made by the Committee and positions taken by the Council as a whole.

Representing the Council

Only the President, or a person delegated by the President, may speak publicly or make representation on behalf of the Council.

Financial arrangements

The Council does not seek to be a legal entity, hold funds or become incorporated at this time. If there are initiatives that the Council wants to progress from time to time that require funding, the Council may seek member contributions and/or in-kind support, as appropriate, from other organisations.

Insurance

The Council avoids being involved in matters that may necessitate the need for public liability or professional indemnity insurance. Thus, the Council is not directly involved in carrying out on-ground work, running events or providing professional advice for remuneration. These activities can be encouraged by the Council but auspiced by partner organisations with the necessary insurances.

The Committee will periodically review the requirement for insurance and, if deemed necessary, put a proposal to the membership at a General Meeting.

Membership Fees

The Council seeks to operate without the need for membership fees.

The Committee will periodically review the requirement for membership fees and, if deemed needed (e.g. to obtain insurance), put a proposal to the membership at a General Meeting.

Privacy

The Council respects members' rights to privacy. Members may not forward any personal information or quote comments or statements made by other members to any other persons or organisations without the relevant member's consent.

Minutes and recordings of meetings are not to be distributed outside the Council.

Dispute Resolution

In the event of a dispute within the Council membership, the President will intervene and take the issue to the Committee for discussion and resolution.

Amendment, Modification or Variation

This Terms of Reference may be amended, varied or modified through a majority vote by the membership on a motion put at a General Meeting.